

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6263
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RABAT 4609

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, MO
SUBJ: THE INTERNAL SCENE: DRIFT

1. INTRODCUTION AND SUMMARY. KING HASSAN HAS BATTENED DOWN POLITICALLY AND TIGHTENED THE NATION'S BELT AS THE SAHARA HOSTILITIES DRAG ON AND THE ECONOMY SAGS. THIS PHASE FIRST BECAME APPARENT IN PARLIAMENTARY INACTIVITY, AND THE KING'S JUNE 4 SPEECH (RABAT 3344), WHICH WAS ACCOMPANIED BY WARNING TO THE LEFT TO COOL IT. BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN PUT IF NOT ON ICE THEN UNDER REFRIGERATION FOR THREE YEARS. THE AUSTERITY MEASURES HAVE YET TO BE WIDELY FELT BUT COULD HAVE IMPORTANT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES. COMING TO TERMS WITH AN INEVITABLE DOWNTURN IN THE ECONOMY WILL EXACERBATE BOTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATIONARY TRENDS.

2. THE PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIMENT HAS BECOME A MATTER MORE OF FORM THAN SUBSTANCE. THE POLITICAL PARTIES,
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HOWEVER, SEEM WILLING FOR THE TIME BEING TO GO ALONG WITH THE EXPERIMENT. ALTHOUGH THE KING IS COMMITTED TO FULLY CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, THE CONSTRAINTS OF THE MONTHS AHEAD ARE LIKELY TO INHIBIT GROWTH IN PARTICIPATORY GOVERNMENT. END INTRODUCTION.

3. PARLIAMENT: SLOW START. THE SPRING SESSION DID NOT

PROVE TO BE AN AUSPICIOUS WIND-UP TO PARLIAMENT'S FIRST YEAR. EVEN THE KING IN A JUNE 16 INTERVIEW (RABAT 3748) CRITICIZED PARILAMENTARIANS FOR NOT HAVING BEEN SUFFICIENTLY "DILIGENT" IN THEIR WORK. THE SESSION, WHICH BEGAN APRIL 14, HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO FOCUS ON THE NEXT FIVE YEAR PLAN. THIS EXPECTATION HELD VIRTUALLY UP TO THE JUNE 4 SPEECH, WHEN THE KING ANNOUNCED THERE WOULD ONLY BE A THREE YEAR, AUSTERITY-ORIENTED "TRANSITIONAL" PLAN. PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY WAS THUS REDUCED MAINLY TO THE THURSDAY INTERPELLATION SESSIONS AND INTERMITTANT ACTIVITY BY SOME COMMITTEES. THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE DID NOT MEET AT ALL. THE GOVERNMENT SUBMITTED ONLY TWO RELATIVELY MINOR PIECES OF LEGISLATION. PRO-GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION PARTY DEPUTIES MANAGED TO SUBMIT SOMEWAHT MORE, BUT THE LEGISLATIVE RESULTS WERE SCANT. ABSENTEEISM WAS HIGH. IN FACT, TO DATE THE PARLIAMENT'S ONLY CONCRETE ACHIEVEMENT HAS BEEN TO ESTABLISH CONTACTS WITH OTHER FOREIGN LEGISLATIVE BODIES WITH THE PRINCIPAL AIM OF DEFENDING MOROCCO'S SAHARA POSITION.

4. MOST OBSERVERS ARE AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN WHY THE KING, AFTER SO MUCH FANFARE, HAS NOT ACTED TO ENCOURAGE PARILAMENT TO TAKE ROOT IN THE DAILY LIFE OF THE COUNTRY. DISTRACTIONS OVER THE SAHARA AND LATER ZAIRE PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED, BUT THE PRINCIPAL DISTRACTION WAS THE TARDY RECOGNITION OF THE COUNTRY'S SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. THE KING'S
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SPEECH HAD BEEN PRECEDED BY A MEETING IN WHICH MINISTER OF INTERIOR BENHIMA GATHERED THE PARLIAMENT'S ONLY MEANINGFUL OPPOSITION GROUP, THE USFP (SOCIALISTS), AND TOLD THEM THAT THE COUNTRY'S EXTREMEN STRAITS OBLIGED THEM THE TEMPER THEIR CRITICISM, HELP KEEP THE LID ON THE LABOR SECTOR, AND PLAY BALL. THE COUNTRY, HE SAID, HAD A LONG HARD ROAD AHEAD. FINALLY, RUMORS OF A NEW GOVERNMENT CHANGE HAVE PREVAILED SINCE SPING AND A DEFINITE LETHARGY HAS REIGNED IN MOST MINISTRIES, FROM PRIME MINISTER OSMAN ON DOWN. THE KING'S FOUR ROYAL COUNSELORS (GUEDIRA, BOUTALEB, SLAOUI, AND BENSOUDA) HAVE ACTED AS A GOVERNMENT WITHIN A GOVERNMENT AN BYPASSED EVEN OSMAN--WHO IMPRESSED NO ONE WITH THIS OWN WORKING HABITS--IN CONVEYING INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONSBILE MINISTERS. FRICTIONS HAVE INEVITABLY ARSIEN. IN ADDITION TO OSMAN'S SUFFERING AMOUR-PROPRE, FONMIN BOUCETTA IS REPORTEDLY CHAFING UNDER GUEDIRA'S GUIDING HAND, AND THE COUNSELORS MAY BE SQUABBLING. GUEDIRA IS CLEARLY FIRST AMONG EQUALS IN EVERYONE'S VERSION, THE ONLY CONSTANT IN THE VARIOUS RUMORS OF CHANGES TO COME AFTER RAMADAN.

5. THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUPINGS.

A. THE INDEPENDENTS. THE PRO-GOVERNMENT INDEPENDENTS HELD A COLLOQUIUM UNDER THE TITULAR LEADERSHIP OF OSMAN IN MARCH AND HAVE PROMISED TO MEET AGAIN THIS SEPTEMBER. HOWEVER, THIS DIVERSE GROUP IS NOT NEARER TO FORMING A POLITICAL PARTY THAN THEY WERE IN MARCH. OSMAN REPORTEDLY IS NOT PUSHING THIS IDEA. IN THE MEANTIME, WARNING CRACKS HAVE FORMED IN THE ALREADY LOOSE ALLIANCE AND SOME COMPETITIVE FORCES HAVE BEGUN TO ASSERT THEMSELVES. MANY OF THE NUMEROUS NOTABLES WHO RAN ON THE INDEPENDENT TICKET, INCLUDING SEVERAL FORMER MINISTERS WHO GAVE UP PORTFOLIOS FOLLOWING ELECTORAL VICTORIES LAST YEAR, ARE UNHAPPY WITH THE DISORGANIZATION AND DRIFT OF PARLIAMENT. THE BETTING IS CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THE SEPTEMBER CONGRESS WILL RESULT ONLY IN SOME LARGELY OPTICAL STRENGTHENING OF RANKS AND PERHAPS IN SOME INDEPENDENT LEADERSHIP SHIFTS, BUT NO DECISION TO FORMALIZE THE UNION BEYOND THAT POINT IS EXPECTED, UNLESS AS MAJOR EFFORT BY SOMEONE WITH THE CLOUT OF GUEDIRA IS UNDERTAKEN.

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B. ISTIQLAL. THE GRAND OLD PARTY FINDS ITSELF IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE MARRIAGE. ALTHOUGH ITS OSTENSIBLE SHARE OF POWER INCLUDES TWO OF THE CHOICEST PORTFOLIOS, FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND EDUCATION, IT FINDS ITSELF HAMSTRUNG IN BOTH. FOREIGN POLICY REMAINS THE PRIVILEGED TERRAIN OF THE KING, WITH PARTY CHIEF BOUCETTA AS FOREIGN MINISTER OFTEN FINDING HIMSELF RECEIVING THE KING'S INSTRUCTION THROUGH GUEDIRA. HE HAS HAD TO TRAVEL MUCH OF THE TIME AND FINDS HIMSELF CONSTANTLY UNDER ATTACK BY THE RIVAL USFP FOR ANY FAILURES IN MOROCCO'S DIPLOMATIC DEALINGS, EVEN THOSE OVER WHICH, IN ALL FAIRNESS, HE HAS NO CONTROL. IN FACT, HIS PARTY WAS OPOSSOED TO BOTH OF MOROCCO'S MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY POSITIONS IN RECENT MONTHS: THE SADAT INITIATIVE AND THE SHABA II INTERVENTION. NEVERTHELESS, BOUCETTA HAS BEEN A GOOD SOLIDER--AND OCCASIONALLY EFFECTIVE--IN IMPLEMENTING THE KING'S POLICIES.

IN THE EDUCATION FIELD, ISTIQLAL FINDS ITSELF SEVERLY LIMITED BY THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. FOR EXAMPLE, ITS EXAGGERATED ATTEMPTS TO PUSH

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ARABIZATION WERE BLUNTLY REBUFFED WHEN THE KING ON FEBRUARY 27 PUBLICLY TOLD THE ISTIQLAL LEADERS THAT THE COUNTRY COULD NOT AFFORD THE LUXURY OF RAPID ARABIZATION (SEE RABAT A-18 OF APRIL 21, 1978).

ISTIQLAL'S MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT CAME IN JUNE WHEN A STIKE AGAINST THE NATIONAL AIRLINE BY AN ISTIQLAL-CONTROLLED LOCAL WAS QUASHED BY SECURITY FORCES. ISTIQLAL CHOSE TO WRITE THE MATTER OFF AS AN EXCESS OF ZEAL BY LOCAL OFFICIALS, BUT THE CONSENSUS IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS TELLING ISTIQLAL THAT IT COULD NOT ENJOY THE LUXURY OF OPPOSITION AND GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION AT THE SAME TIME, ESPECIALLY IN THE INCREASINGLY SENSITIVE LABOR SECTOR.

C. USFP. THE SOCIALISTS PROVIDED THE ONLY SPARK IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. THEIR PRESS HAS CONTINUED ENERGETICALLY TO ATTACK GOVERNMENT POLICY ON A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES. THESE INCLUDED GOM SUPPORT OF THE SADAT INITIATIVE, SHABA II, GOM POLICY ON CEUTA AND MELILLA, GOM INACTIVITY IN PARLIAMENT, AND INADEQUACIES IN THE AUSTERITY PROGRAM. USFP ALSO CONTINUED TO AGITATE IN THE LABOR SECTOR, WHERE ITS GAINS WERE BECOMING MORE EVIDENT, AND THERE ARE SIGNS THAT IT MIGHT GO SO FAR AS TO ORGANIZE ITS OWN NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

PARADOXICALLY, NO ONE WAS WILLING TO RULE OUT ENTIRELY THE POSSIBILITY OF USFP ENTERING A RESHUFFLED GOVERNMENT, SOMETHING PARTY CHIEF BOUABID HAS PROMISED TO

DO IN TIME OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY. INDEED THE USFP LEADERS HAVE SOME ESTEEM FOR GUEDIRA'S ABILITIES, IF NOT FOR HIS POLICIES.

D. OTHER PARTIES. EXCEPT FOR THE MINUSCULE COMMUNIST PARTY (PPS) WHICH OFTEN JOINED THE 15 SOCIALISTS IN PARLIAMENTARY VOTING, MOROCCO'S OTHER POLITICAL
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PARTIES REMAINED SILENT AND LOYAL. THE MOST NOTEWORTHY WAS PTT MINISTER MAHJOUBI AHERDAN'S POPULAR MOVEMENT (MP), WHOSE 40 SEATS IN THE PARLIAMENT CONSISTENTLY SIDED WITH THE INDEPENDENTS. THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS THAT THE MP MIGHT LOSE SOME OF ITS FOUR MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS IN A FUTURE CABINET RESHUFFLE.

6. BUCKLING DOWN. THE KING ALSO SAID IN A JUNE 12 MESSAGE TO PARLIAMENT (RABAT 3555) HIS PARLIAMENTARIANS WOULD NOW HAVE THREE YEARS IN WHICH TO LEARN HOW TO RUN THE COUNTRY, A RATHER DIRECT INDICATION THAT THEY SHOULDN'T EXPECT TO BE DOING SO IN THE FUTURE. REINFORCING THIS CONCLUSION, MINISTER OF INTERIOR BENHIMA TOLD THE AMBASSADOR JUNE 23 THAT HE WAS IN THE PROCESS OF REORGANIZING AND RESTAFFING AT LEAST HALF OF HIS 34 GUBERNATORIAL SLOTS. HE SAID THE COUNTRY'S NEEDS IN ITS "ECONOMIC WAR" FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS WOULD REQUIRE MUCH MORE ENERGETIC GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL AT PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS.

7. THE FULL EFFECT OF THE ECONOMIC BELT-TIGHTENING WILL NOT BE FELT FOR SOME TIME (SEE RABAT 3334 AND 4066). HOWEVER, THE LIKELY DISRUPTION IN THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR AND THE INFLATIONARY CONSEQUENCES MAY WELL PROMPT SOCIAL UNREST. NO ONE KNOWS YET, FOR EXAMPLE, HOW THE COUNTRY'S EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS WILL REACT TO THIS NEW DEPRIVATION OF ITS WHETTED APPETITE. THE MOROCCAN HAS IN THE PAST BEEN ACCEPTING OF HARDSHIP, AND AS LONG AS SACRIFICES ARE CLEARLY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN MOROCCO'S POSITION IN ITS CONFRONTATION WITH ALGERIA, HE WILL PROBABLY SUPPORT IT IN THE FUTURE. HOWEVER, IN SUCH A SETTING THE LIKELIHOOD THAT DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES WILL EVOLVE TO ANY MEANINGFUL DEGREE SEEMS DIM, THE KING'S COMMITMENTS NOTWITHSTANDING.

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